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*Film Quarterly*, Vol. 17, No. 1. (Autumn, 1963), pp. 3-13.

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*Film Quarterly* is currently published by University of California Press.

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# François Truffaut—An Interview

*Translated and condensed by Paul Ronder; reprinted by permission  
from "Cahiers du Cinéma," No. 138, December, 1962.*

*What do you think of the situation of the Nouvelle Vague in France today?*

It changes from day to day. Now the situation isn't all that it might be, but don't forget that when the situation was good, it was good beyond all expectation. Toward the end of 1959, it was almost like living in a dream: conditions existed that were unimaginable two years earlier.

For example, I remember an article by Marguerite Duras, in *France-Observateur*, in which she described working with Alain Resnais on *Hiroshima Mon Amour*. She quoted Resnais as saying: "We have to operate on the principle that if we manage to get this film shown, it will be a miracle." And the international success of *Hiroshima* in relation to the modesty of this beginning (even admitting modesty is a characteristic trait of Resnais) seems to me significant.

I think it was the same for all of us. While shooting *400 Blows*, I was terrified to watch my budget of \$56,000 edge up to \$70,000. I panicked; I had the feeling I was embarking on a project that was bound to fail. But once finished, with the Cannes Festival and the foreign sales, the film more than made its money back. For example, in the States alone, it was bought for \$100,000.

You can imagine our euphoria then, in 1959, when the situation was so extraordinarily good. And you can imagine the dreams aroused by such a situation — dreams which seem now perhaps a bit excessive. Even the producers began dreaming: they began to believe that the secret of success lay uniquely in youth, novelty, etc., and they themselves dashed out in search of new talent.

Much has already been said about that. However there is something well worth recalling: the first failures began with compromise. A producer, faced with an inexperienced director, might say to himself: "All I have to do is give the boy a good cameraman." Now it's a very serious mistake to give an experienced professional cameraman to a debutant director: the resulting film is sure to be deformed. . . . The same mistake occurred in other ways as well, such as imposing traditional scenarios or star actors in films that just weren't made for them. . . .

As for the film-makers, we too formed some wrong ideas about the best way to make films. . . . Briefly, our mistake was to assume that it was in the producer's interest to make films cheaply. We forgot about that old law of the French film industry which decrees that the producer isn't the man *with* the money, but the man who finds it, and that his only assured revenue is a certain percentage of the film's budget. . . . The bigger the budget, the bigger this percentage. This explains why so many films are made here for \$400,000 or \$600,000 when they should cost half that amount, and why at heart so many producers don't really care what kind of film they make.

Ideally, the directors of our films should have been their own producers, so that there would have been no conflict between the commercial and artistic interests in the films.

*Do you think it true that the present crisis in French film-making is a crisis of the young film-makers?*

It's true. But it's no less true that it's a crisis of the older generation. In other words, the crisis is general. As for saying that this crisis

is the defeat of the Nouvelle Vague, that's absolutely false. . . .

*Don't you find the system of film distribution in France ineffective and outdated?*

Definitely. At the same time, I am personally opposed to making any sort of discrimination between films. I wouldn't at all like to see a chain of theaters established to show *only* "Nouvelle Vague" films, or any other kind of films, for that matter. I believe that a film must not be limited in its appeal: this seems to me contradictory to the goals of the cinema. Being popular art, all films should have popular appeal. Popular appeal established, then artistic miracles are possible.

The publicity for *Marienbad*, which consisted of distributing notices at the entrance to the theater informing the spectators that they were going to see a rather special film, and asking them not to search for any precise meaning but simply to appreciate the film's mood and atmosphere — this was something very loyal to the film. At the same time, it seems to me unfortunate, because contradictory to the very idea of film as "entertainment" — that no matter who, no matter where (all too often it's also no matter when or how) can go into a movie theater uncertain of what they'll see, but certain it will be entertaining.

Personally I still believe in the stills displayed in front of movie theaters. Now everyone says that people, even in the provinces, know ahead of time what kind of film they are going to see — but I still think that most of them choose a film simply by looking at these photos — as I did when I was a kid. . . .

*And what about those Nouvelle Vague films considered, rightly or wrongly, as uncommercial?*

These films all end up being released — one by one. What happened here in 1959 was so extraordinary that it gave birth to a good many excesses. Actually I believe that a film must not be experimental on all levels at once; that even in the most avant-garde film there must be something which ties it to the older,

more classical films: a strong plot, an important star, etc. I can't help feeling that too many modern films have been made haphazardly, without discipline or craftsmanship. However, taking wild chances doesn't always work. And among the films that fail, one always finds too large a gap between the intention and the result — the whole problem, I believe, lies there. . . .

Nevertheless, I don't really believe that there is much injustice in the public's response to films. Perhaps this is partly because I am more prone to notice justice than injustice. In the majority of cases, I believe that if a film is unsuccessful with the public, it deserves to be; that in the long run, quality is respected. Thus I find it right that *Moderato Cantabile* should have been much less successful than *Hiroshima*, even though it pretended to be its successor — without, of course, being anything of the sort.

As for me, I've only had one misunderstanding with the public: *Shoot the Piano Player*, and I consider myself fully responsible for it. . . .

*Before beginning to make films, you wrote film criticism for the periodical Arts. How would you evaluate your former critical beliefs today?*

In my articles in *Arts*, I would essentially repeat and popularize the critical positions taken in *Cahiers*. This happened especially at the start, for little by little my criticism became more personal, especially since I began to be interested in films that wouldn't have interested *Cahiers* in the least. At the same time, I learned to submit myself to certain obligations. In *Cahiers*, telling the story of each film could easily be dispensed with. In a weekly journal, the story must be told, and for me, this was an extremely good exercise. Also, I think that in *Cahiers*, the critic feels the obligation to criticize each film on its own level, that is, to try and adapt the critical criteria to the film. For one film it may be necessary to speak abstractly of the directorial conception, for another, to analyze the scenario it-

self — each film demands its own particular treatment.

In any case, the necessity to tell the story of a film every week was very good for me. Before that, I didn't really see the films. I was so intoxicated with the idea of "cinema" that I could see nothing but a film's movement and rhythm. In fact at the beginning I had such trouble summing up the stories that I had to consult a plot synopsis. This experience helped me to realize the faults of certain scenarios, certain gimmicks, certain easy ways of telling a story. I began to recognize anything in a film that had been copied from another film. For me this was an immensely worthwhile period — my experience in it corresponded with what must be the experience of a scriptwriter. It helped me to see things more clearly, and to become more aware of my own values, tastes, and proclivities.

However I ended up becoming much too cutting in my criticism. During my last year with *Arts*, my criticism was no longer that of a film critic, but already that of a film director. I would only get excited by those films related to what I myself wanted to do. I became too partisan, and, as a result, too vicious.

Paradoxically, in my directing today, there remains something of the critic's frame of mind. For example, when I've finished working on a scenario, I feel that I know, if not its faults, at least its dangers — especially in regard to what is trite and conventional in it. This knowledge guides me, gives me a direction to take against these dangers during the shooting.

With each film I have done, the danger has been different. In the *400 Blows*, the danger was becoming overly lyrical about childhood. In *Shoot the Piano Player*, it was creating too much hero-worship for a man who was always right. In *Jules and Jim*, it was portraying the woman as an exquisite shrew who could do no wrong. I was well aware of these dangers while shooting these films, and a large part of my work then consisted of trying to keep each film from succumbing to its inherent weakness.

It so happens that my efforts in this direction caused all three of my films to end up being sadder films than planned, since seriousness, it seems to me, permits greater subtlety of expression. Something that becomes more serious becomes more true. If one were to read, for example, the original scenario of the *400 Blows*, one would discover the plot of a comedy. And in *Shoot the Piano Player*, where the danger was having the central character become too sympathetic, I tried so hard to point up his artist's egotism, his desire to isolate himself from the world, and his cowardice, that I made him finally rather hard and unattractive — almost antipathetic. Doubtless this is one of the reasons for the film's failure. The same thing happened with *Jules and Jim*: since I didn't want the audience simply to adore the character played by Jeanne Moreau, I rendered her finally a bit too hard.

Nevertheless, my improvisation on the set has always been in an effort to counteract the danger I sensed while reading the finished scenario. That's what still remains of my formation as a critic.

*Even when you made The 400 Blows, did you have this kind of considerations in mind?*

I made that film in a very instinctive way. The story determined everything else: such a thing had to be seen by the child, therefore it had to be filmed in such a way. Besides, much of the film was essentially documentary, and

Jean-Pierre Léaud in *THE 400 BLOWS*.



this necessitated an enormous neutrality on my part.

In fact, lots of cinephiles here were very disappointed with *400 Blows*, since they are only interested in and excited by the form of a film. And the film I made was without form, neutral — since my direction of it was as objective as possible and corresponded almost to a self-effacement. When I see the film now, I too find in it a certain simplicity and clumsiness, yet the effects I wanted to obtain were themselves often very simple. It's a film that has left me with much nostalgia: I have the feeling that I will never again find a subject as direct, as strongly felt, nor one which provides me with so little choice. There were some things in that film about which I felt so strongly that I simply could not have done them any differently. In addition, now that I tend to work with scenarios that are more sophisticated (the word isn't laudatory since I don't think it necessarily implies an advancement), I have begun to miss terribly being able to create situations that in their simplicity could touch a whole audience at the same time. . . .

As for the art of directing, I first became really aware of it while doing *Shoot the Piano Player*. At the same time, in the midst of shooting, I began to feel sorry for having chosen so inconsequential a story, and decided to have some fun with it.

Essentially, my writing of reviews was based on the same principle. People say: "Truffaut's films have nothing whatever to do with what he used to write." I can't tell you how untrue that is. For example, I have the reputation for doing much cutting of my films just before they are released — often for cutting them even between the preview showings and the premiere. Now when I would write an article for *Arts*, I would often cut out a third of it before delivering it, for I was terribly afraid of being boring. Sometimes I would go so far as to replace long words with short ones. The first draft I would write nervously and rapidly, then I would cut one sentence out of every

three so that the article wouldn't drag and would demand attentive reading.

I would invariably review a film while thinking of its director. I wanted to try and touch him (but when I tore apart a film, my way of trying to touch him would become vicious); I wanted above all to convince him. In writing my review I would say to myself: "Using this word will win him over better than using that one." This is also why my last year of criticism had less merit: alongside of evaluating what the director *had* done in his film, I began to explain what I thought he *should have* done.

*Now that you experience film-making from the "inside," don't you find your understanding of it different?*

Certainly my judgment has changed. If I had to return now to criticism, I would definitely write differently, but for another reason. The kind of film-making that I believed in and advocated has arrived. And now I see its disadvantages — there were bound to be some. This is why it is so annoying to hear people still quoting some of my early writings. For example, once just after seeing *And God Created Woman* at a film festival, I wrote enthusiastically in *Arts*: "Films today no longer need to tell a story — it is enough that they tell of a first love, that they take place on a beach, etc." But today films like these have become such commonplaces that I wince to hear my words quoted now. In fact, in the films made since then the scenarios have been so mistreated that now I find myself longing to see a film with a well-told story. At the same time, let's not assume we must return at all costs to the kind of cinema that existed before the Nouvelle Vague.

I made *Jules and Jim* somewhat in reaction against mistreated scenarios. For example, I was told that I would have to modernize the period of the original book; and in substituting the second World War for the first, the transposition would have been simple. But since the film was to be about a woman and love, I refused. I was anxious not to have my film be like all the rest made today on these particular

## TRUFFAUT

topics: with a sports car (there would have had to be one in the film, on the bridge), lots of scotch, and of course a high-fidelity set, as compulsory equipment. Had I done this, I would have been in complete conformity with the rules of the "nouveau cinéma." However I chose to remain faithful to the period of the book, and try and pattern *Jules and Jim* after some of the small films made by MGM during the 40's, like *Mrs. Parkington* and *The Green Years* — films whose only fault was being conventional, but films which succeeded marvelously in creating the mood of a huge 800-page novel, of many years passing, of much white hair arriving. You see, I didn't want to follow the fashion, even a fashion that has produced so many films I love. . . .

*Then if you had to return to being a critic?*

I would be like everyone else: I would have lots of trouble. And I would lack serenity. The critics I find I like best today are those who are a bit outside the pale of film-making. . . . One senses that they don't know any of the directors and that they are simply pleased that there are more interesting films than ever before. Therefore they try, with a maximum of benevolence and a minimum of complaisance, to convey the feelings a particular film gave them, objectively, as though they were writing about a film classic. That's the attitude one must have today. Perhaps I seem to contradict myself, since we used to be very heated critics. But at that time it was necessary; since we had to tear down certain ideas and build up certain others, we had to make lots of noise. Today, however, I think it necessary for a critic to be very calm.

*Then it would be much harder to be a critic today?*

Much. . . . It seems to be almost a general law among critics that they form into factions to defend unequivocally their own positions. Sometimes the animosity between factions results in articles which are unbelievably vicious, and which even the authors themselves seem to regret later on. But instead of indulging one's passions in one's criticism, one must



Charles Aznavour and Nicole Berger:  
*TIREZ SUR LE PIANISTE.*

at least try to be critical with some purpose. Today especially, taking sides is worthless. What is worthwhile, yet difficult, is analysis. . . . What is interesting is not pronouncing a film good or bad, but explaining why. . . .

Today I understand much better what makes a film interesting. Yet in making my own films, I readily admit the necessity of considering the public, for I believe that a film which is a popular failure cannot have been an artistic success. At the same time, I could never consider *Lola Montès* a bad film, or that Bresson was wrong because he had a popular failure. But then these are my personal theories, and I don't claim that they are valid for all people or for all films.

*Then you would not make a film without thinking of the public?*

No, I couldn't be enthusiastic enough about making films for myself. I wouldn't have the desire to make films if I knew that they weren't going to be seen. I need that knowledge: it gives me impetus. I must create a kind of "show for others." I know I wouldn't be able to write a novel: that kind of creativity would be too abstract for me. I would much rather be a singing coach, or better still, the director of a whole vaudeville show. It's necessary to me that my work, collective even in its origins, be seen by the public, and judged by it. . . .

Nor would I be able to make a film which

I felt would automatically be a success. Each of my films has been a kind of gamble. For me, shooting a film should be taking a chance—and winning.

Lots of people didn't like the scenario for *Jules and Jim*. The distributors said: "that woman is a whore," "the husband is going to seem pretty grotesque," etc. The gamble for me was to see if I would be able to make the woman sympathetic rather than whore-like (without making the film itself melodramatic), and if I could keep the husband from seeming ridiculous. I love trying to show something by the end of a film that wasn't obvious at the start. The same thing happened with the *400 Blows*. But there the gamble was a false one: the film was a success from its very inception. Only I didn't realize it; I started out unimaginably innocent. As I saw it, the gamble was having for my central character a boy who did something surreptitious every five minutes. Everyone told me I was crazy, that the boy would seem awful, that the public wouldn't stand for it. In fact, during the shooting, it did make quite a bad impression to see the boy stealing things right and left; I must have given the impression that I was making a documentary film on juvenile delinquency. Unfortunately, I was somewhat influenced by all these warnings to be cautious—now I regret it.

For in fact everyone forgot, as I did myself, that a child is forgiven everything, that it is always the parents who take the blame. I thought that by favoring the child, I was balancing the film. Little did I know how out of balance it already was in his favor! I was very naive, yet the film ended up being, in its naivety, very shrewd.

I realize now, four years later, that the film is Hitchcockian. Why? Because one identified with the child from the first shot to the last... As I see it, the subjective camera is the exact contrary of the subjective film—since as soon as the camera is substituted for a given person, it becomes impossible to identify with him. A subjective film can only exist when the actor's gaze meets that of the spectator. Thus



Jeanne Moreau and Oscar Werner: *JULES AND JIM*.

if the public of a film feels the need to orient itself (as happens when the film is shot without any point of view imposed by the director), it will automatically identify with the face it sees most frequently; that is, with the actor most often photographed from the front and in close-ups. This is what happened with Jean-Pierre Léaud. In doing a documentary of him, I thought I was being objective. However the more I filmed him straight-on and close-up, the more I gave him an existence, and the more I helped an audience to associate with him. I realized this only by seeing my film in public, and hearing people cry (as they often do at Hitchcock films) when the boy's mother appeared behind the classroom window. It's true that I had worked very carefully on this scene in advance because of its difficulty, rath-

er than improvising it in front of the camera as I often did. Even so, I am convinced that the audience's sentiment resulted not from my skill but from their natural empathy for the boy. They are moved then — as they are when the boy realizes his mother is dead — simply because the boy *himself* is moved.

Thus the film was completely naive — made in total ignorance of certain laws of the cinema; yet at the same time, it was unconsciously contrived, much more than any of the films that followed it.

In a way, I made *Shoot the Piano Player* in reaction to *400 Blows*, for the film's success, and its terrible one-sidedness that I only later discovered, dazed me so much that I said to myself: From now on you must be very careful not to fall into demagoguery. Still, I'm not quite sure what did happen with *Shoot the Piano Player*. Finally I guess I remained too faithful to the book. Also, I was too sure of myself after the success of *400 Blows*. But it's always like that for a second film. Thus *A Woman is a Woman* (because of the banning of *The Little Soldier*, I consider this Godard's second film) was made in the exuberance of the success of *Breathless*, while *Vivre Sa Vie* marked a return to control.

For the first film, one really plunges in: "O.K., I'll risk everything; afterwards maybe I won't make any more films, but now I want to see just what I can do." The reaction of the public to the first film is very important. If it is successful, the director is always astonished — and the second film shows the effects of this. Even *Marlenbad* exhibits a great self-confidence born from an unexpected success. All second films have this in common: they are less complete than their predecessors, in which the director wanted to say everything at once. The second film is intentionally more modest in its ambitions. It's the third however that is the most interesting: it's a reconsideration of the other two, and marks the start of a career.

Look closely at *Shoot the Piano Player*, and you'll see that the scenario simply doesn't stand

up under analysis. It absolutely lacks an organizing idea, which my other two films nevertheless both have. In *400 Blows*, I was guided by the desire to portray a child as honestly as possible, and to invest his actions with a moral significance. Similarly, with *Jules and Jim*, my desire to keep the film from seeming either pornographic, indelicate, or conventional guided me. The trouble with *Shoot the Piano Player* was that I was able to do anything — that the subject itself didn't impose its own form. Aznavour has a marvelous comic ability — I could have made the film comic; he has great authority — I could have made the film tough. But at the beginning, I didn't know what I wanted to do — aside from a mad desire to use Aznavour, because of *La Tête contre Les Murs*. Of course I should have waited until I knew him better.

The gamble I took in *Shoot the Piano Player* was using flashbacks, knowing that doing this was something unpardonable, something an audience would never forgive. . . . And in fact, the flashbacks *did* mess things up. It's almost a law: one simply can't intermix things which are basically distinct. It's impossible to be in the midst of one story and in the midst of another at the same time. With some work, I am sure I would have been able to tell the story chronologically. It just would have taken more work! As it stands, there are some nice bits in the film, but it can't be said: this is the best work on this particular theme. There isn't any theme.

*Couldn't one say the theme was this: a man is caught in the wheels; first he tries to fight, finally he resigns himself to it. Courage, then cowardliness . . . ?*

Even then there are problems of consistency. And there is also the problem of the director, who had to resign *himself* to be caught in the wheels of the gangster film! It hadn't occurred to me beforehand, but while shooting *Shoot the Pianist*, I realized that I detested gangster films. No longer will I write glowing tributes to *Rififi*. No longer will I consider the director's job simply to create gangsters who are



moving — tough guys who cry, or simply to set the good guys against the bad. The result is a film where all the bourgeois conventions are simply transported into the gangster world. This is why I suddenly decided to make my gangsters funny: making fun of them became the only way for me to keep from being conventional. Nevertheless to balance the film, I had to let my gangsters be frightening sometimes — this was accomplished by the kidnapping of the boy and the killing of Marie Dubois. These scenes woke up lots of people who otherwise might have thought they were watching a bunch of shadow puppets. However it's dangerous to change conceptions in the middle of a film. One should have an idea at the start and solidify it, as I did in my other two films, though the central ideas were vaguely expressed in the original scenario. Also, if I had known beforehand that Aznavour and Nicole Berger (no other actress I tried could come near her) would make such an extraordinary couple, I would have made a film just about the two of them.

*Don't you think the change of tone in Shoot the Piano Player also bothered the public? This has characterized many failures — for example, A Woman Is A Woman — and is something the French public has never tolerated.*

Yes, it is hard to make a change of tone acceptable to an audience. Nevertheless, in America people liked *Shoot the Pianist* only they understood it differently — they laughed all the time, even at the serious passages. The first song in the film *was* supposed to be funny, but they also laughed at the second, which theoretically *wasn't* supposed to be. . . . A change of tone simply needs to be worked out carefully — it's a gamble that sometimes must be risked. Renoir tried it, and he succeeded.

*But Rules of the Game was a popular failure.*

Yes, but *Rules of the Game* is one of those rare cases where a great film passed over the heads of its public. . . . I'm convinced that sometimes a film-maker must violate his pub-

lic. I honestly believe that pleasing people is important, but I also believe that every film must contain some degree of "planned violence" upon its audience. In a good film, people must be made to see something that they don't want to see: they must be made to approve of someone of whom they had disapproved, they must be forced to look where they had refused to look. One could build a whole film around the idea of making people understand what marriage, love, and adultery would be in relation to some criminal act. . . .

Resnais would never say: I think of the public when making a film. As a matter of fact, I don't think he does. But he *does* think of his films as "spectacles." I am absolutely sure that *Marienbad* is made with consideration given to such matters as people's emotions, the sweep of the scenario, and the equilibrium of the finished film. Otherwise, why not have the film last eight hours? Resnais isn't Stroheim; his films last an hour and a half, and they are constructed in a systematic and methodical fashion. Now from the Resnais films certain young film-makers draw a lesson of courage instead of drawing a lesson of skill. Right after *Hiroshima*, they began to say of Resnais: he's marvelous, he proves that everything is possible. But that's not true. He proves that everything is possible for Resnais. In the basic idea of *Hiroshima*, one finds all the things that shouldn't be done: intermixing adultery and the atomic bomb, that is, a very small problem with a very large one, a very personal one with a very political one; and attempting to equate the huge disgrace of the bomb with the small scandals of the liberation. To attempt such a combination is really playing with explosives; to have made it work is a phenomenal success. Nevertheless that doesn't mean that everyone should try to do what Resnais, alone, knew how to do.

Many films made today have been "inspired" by *Hiroshima*: films which no longer consider the plot or the public. But Resnais considered them. He knew very well that by having Riva do this or that in *Hiroshima*, he

would create this or that emotion in the spectator. Only a naive film-maker could have been encouraged, instead of being discouraged, by *Hiroshima*. I don't say that *Hiroshima* necessarily must be discouraging, but one must remember the great skill it demanded, and not simply think: "The fad's begun. All I have to do is follow." I think Resnais would render a great service to film-makers if he would stress the *difficulties* he has had, instead of letting them think they can do whatever comes into their heads. . . .

The success of certain unusual films can be attributed to their being so completely unusual, their being esteemed as such, and their being seen specially for their strangeness. Resnais, since he is considered a specialist in the off-beat, even as having something of a patent on it (for me this doesn't diminish his genius in the least, but rather increases it), has the right to be off-beat. But if he suddenly were to decide to make a normal film, that would have serious consequences for him. . . .

It has come to this: everybody wanted a change. Now the change has come, and they are irritated if the results are too special.

Even toward Antonioni (whom I don't like) there's a great ill-naturedness. People are delirious over his first two films, then turn on him with might and main. That was the case

with Bergman, and also Losey. It begins in Paris, then spreads. It's specially sad for Bergman, since his last film is much better than his earlier ones.

The case of Godard is particularly interesting to me since he is an unconventional film-maker who could, if he wished, easily integrate himself. Yet his is a special case, since what interests him most is creating a complex *mélange* of styles: at the moment one of his films approaches the fictional, he quickly makes an about-face toward the documentary, once arrived there only to rush off again in still another direction. Nevertheless there is great logic in his career. Just look at his criticism in *Cahiers*: from the start one senses a disdain for complete fiction, coupled with an admiration for those films in which the plot is destroyed in the making. However his own personality is so strong that he never need question what he does: he does it, and it becomes right.

*Do you think the conventional and unconventional film-makers could get together?*

What is common to both is the desire to do good work. No one is happy doing a lousy job; actors, for example, are unhappy when they make bad films. It's something to re-

*Homage to Renoir: JULES AND JIM.*



member, and something of a weapon for our side.

On the other hand, we mustn't be 100% daring. This remark could easily be misunderstood: what I mean is that we must think out our extravagances and measure out our audacity. We must have our trump card from the start, and try not to show all our tricks at once. . . .

*As a director, what do you think of American cinema today?*

In relation to the American film-makers, I think we French are all intellectuals, even me, and I am the least intellectual of my compatriots. But we mustn't cheat, we mustn't pretend to be rough or simple if basically we're reflective or analytical. We mustn't try to be what we're not. This is unquestionably where a film-maker like Melville makes his mistake: in trying to imitate American brutality and rusticity. But if we believe that the cinema is a popular art — and we all believe it, having grown up nourished by American films — we can arrive at another alternative: that of a discipline in our work sufficient to permit our films to be complete on several levels at once. And what better example of this, than the films of Hitchcock.

He is one of those rare film-makers who is able to please everyone. I am convinced that his procedure is applicable to our films, or to be precise, to those which are made "coldly." Resnais works a great deal on his films, yet I don't believe that he created in *Marienbad* emotions or successful effects that can't also be found in *Vertigo*. Nor do I believe that *Vertigo* is made interesting to the general public through concession or compromise, but rather through supplementary discipline.

*Are you suggesting that instead of working for a year and making Marienbad, Resnais should have worked for a year and a half and ended up making a Vertigo?*

No, I maintain that Resnais was absolutely justified in making *Marienbad*. But if one isn't Resnais, if one doesn't have his extraordinary degree of control, I think it's better to be more

modest. I'm not suggesting limiting one's ambitions, but simply being more modest in the way they are realized — that is, making films which are simple in appearance. Personally, I don't believe for a moment that the world needs either me or my films. I believe I must make the world accept me, and that only by hard work will I succeed.

I believe that today we must reverse our way of thinking about film-making. Formerly our object was to cut away everything considered extraneous to the underlying subject of a film in order to obtain a slender basic framework. But this slenderness is terribly annoying for all those who fail to understand the film's central idea (and there will always be those people). Therefore films should really contain two subjects: the genuine, plus another which everyone can understand. But today in France, this kind of cleverness is lacking. . . .

I like spectacle, music halls, variety shows, but I also have preoccupations which aren't interesting to the majority. The problem in *Jules and Jim*, for example, interests very few people. On top of that, out of every ten people who see the film, nine consider divorce scandalous. For me to ask these people to sympathize with two grotesques who do nothing all day, and live together with the same woman, is almost pure insolence. Therefore I must offer them something in exchange, like a moment of high emotion, a moment when the actors let loose — as they did in the crying scene (which was improvised) between Werner and Jeanne Moreau. I don't want people saying to themselves on the way out: "It was scandalous"; I'd be the first to suffer. Of course it's impossible to satisfy everyone, but it is possible to keep from completely ruining anyone's evening. If people say on the way out: "Well, at least there was that song," or: "At least there were those lovely landscapes," or: "At least there were all those shots from the war," — well, even that's better than nothing.

A director should know exactly what he wants to obtain in a film, and above all, he

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should not try to obtain more than *one thing at a time*. He must know how to create emotions: before each film, each scene, and each shot, he must stop and ask himself how he can create the particular emotion he desires. Everything in the film, the scene, or the shot which does not help to answer that question is parasitic and must be cut. We work in a domain which simultaneously is literary, musical, and spatial, and one in which we must always simplify to the uttermost. A film is like a boat: it's just asking to be sunk. And I swear that with both, it's a hundred times simpler to have a catastrophe than a success. If a film-maker doesn't understand this law, he's cooked. If he believes in luck and likes to take things as they come, he's irresponsible. The only film-maker I could admire would be one personally courageous enough to recite a poem by Rimbaud in the middle of two circus acts at Barnum and Bailey. . . .

Also, the massive arrival of the new French film directors created great competition here, and pushed the French system closer to the Hollywood system. It became much harder for directors to escape a sort of type-casting, and much harder for them to survive a failure. At present, it's better not to have done anything than to have made an unsuccessful film. . . .

It seems to me there is a balance to be found. The Hollywood system was in balance. And how awesome to witness the terrible fall of Hollywood when the old framework broke apart. All went well when the movies were mass-produced, when the directors weren't permitted to have opinions, when the scriptwriters were paid by the year, when films were edited by specialists without ever consulting the director, etc. But as soon as the screws began to loosen, everything fell apart. . . .

But the Americans had one inimitable quality: they knew, in each branch of their work, how to make what they did come alive. And often their scenarios were marvelous. Recently I received a scenario written by Philip Yordan, and everything's already there, even humor — it's ready to be shot without changing a



From Truffaut's episode in *LOVE AT TWENTY*.  
(Jean-Pierre L aud, right)

thing. The American cinema was both the finest and the worst: it was most often brilliant with conventional films, but there the result was marvelous.

Finally, no one merits total freedom. Many new film-makers here are immature and make terrible blunders. The majority of the films I see are really badly edited: through complacency, lack of critical sense, or mere laziness, their makers are reluctant to cut. Once I made fun of Jacques Becker who said: "Le cin ma, c'est tr s compliqu ." I preferred personally those who said "c'est simple," but saying this is a luxury not everyone can afford. . . . In television they resort to lengthy shots and almost never achieve good *champs-contrechamps*. In films therefore, by reaction, it's good to cut a lot, to return to classical cutting. Five years ago, when I was still a critic, French films were ugly. That's why the first films of Vadim and Malle were so important: simply because they exhibited a minimum of good taste. Today, everyone has taste and films, in general, are more handsome. Now we must begin to aim still higher. We must try to make each of our films clear, interesting, intelligent, moving, and beautiful all at once. We must try to shoot each, to quote Ingmar Bergman, "as though it were our last." In short, we must compel ourselves to continue making progress.